

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2018  
Ephesians  
The Privileges and Obligations of Adoption

Last time we looked at one of the Spiritual Blessings which is a consequence of God's work of Salvation. The 'contents' of salvation, are all gracious elements which demonstrate the great love He has for His people. Salvation is something that God does for us, and while He does not need to do it since His eternal happiness will not be increased or diminished by our salvation or otherwise, we desperately need it. This Salvation, while a legal transaction that God solely conducts, is not devoid of mercy and we would say care and affection. I suppose, strictly speaking, if a rescue ship saved the crew of a sinking vessel and landed them on an Island somewhere and then left without a word, they would in the strictest sense have rescued the crew of the sinking ship. Duty done, kindness done, job done.

However because of God's great grace and mercy and goodness, once we have been saved from our sinking ship, He does not just land us, but He takes us to His own port and there provides for us, cares for us, loves us and makes us His own people. Now that is rescue with a capital R! The meaning of the word, 'Salvation' is complete rescue and safety. This is what these verses in Ephesians is explaining to us, how God rescues and makes us safe, and what it looks like.

In Christianity we are adopted by God to be His sons and daughters by the transaction accomplished by Christ through the Cross, His death and Resurrection and Ascension to the right hand of His Father. John 1 v 12. All of this becomes ours when we receive and believe Christ into our lives. As we receive Christ, He brings all these graces and benefits in Himself. We get the giver and the gift together. The gift is in the giver. If we do not have the giver, we will never get the gift. We receive the gift as we receive the giver. This is why we must receive Christ, all the gifts come to us with Him.

We also pointed out last time that Christ is the eternally begotten of the Father. The early Church rhyme says that, 'there was never a time when the Son was not.' Jesus was begotten from eternity. We, on the other hand, are adopted children. We are not little gods, we will ever be creatures.

There are many, many consequences that arise from being adopted children of the Father, we will consider some of them.

1. Adoption is the highest expression of God's love for us. As I have said, God does not need us. God's self-existence and perfections excludes any possibility that we can add to or take away from the eternal perfections of God. We are not doing God a favour by believing in Him, we are not helping out a lonely old man who craves company. Even in our daily lives, even if we obeyed God perfectly, all our work and service is only our due and of no merit before God. All of our Christian life is by God's grace and mercy and we need to remember this.

It is the Cross that makes it possible for God to adopt us in righteousness, in a way consistent with His own character and being. No court, not that there is a higher court than the command of God, will ever find a legal loophole to overturn God's decision and adoption of His people. This is important, because God has not adopted fine upstanding young men as the Roman father did. God has chosen to adopt, through the Cross of Christ, people who are slaves to sin, to passions and desires, rebels, who defy God's commands and have the wickedness to declare, 'who does God think He is to command me counter to my desires?' Moreover, God adopts people who are dead, rebellious, unfeeling towards Him and who have defied Him all their lives up to this point. This is the demonstration of His love and His power.

There is a Hymn that addresses this –

How can it be, thou heavenly King,  
That thou shouldst us to glory bring?  
Make slaves the partners of thy throne,  
Decked with a never-fading crown?

German Trans J Wesley.

For the author of this hymn, what God has done in adoption, and making us heirs is utterly astonishing and a thing of wonder which should cause us to offer eternal gratitude and praise!

However, adoption is the start. God will make us become children who are like Him, we cannot stay as we are, and this is a process by which the Holy Spirit works holiness in us by carrot and stick as well as working to cause us to desire to be like Christ. The Prodigal son did not stay prodigal. He did not come home to the fathers house and plunder it and go off to the wilds again, he changed by remembering the graciousness of the father's home. Grace will change us, and we have our part to do in the process of becoming clean through and through.

2. Adoption is an eternal blessing. It is not like human adoption which ends with death. Now that metaphor of earthly adoption breaks down, but God's adoption of us never does. The point is this, which is better, eternal blessings or temporal blessings? Is it better to have something good in this life, or have something better in eternity? The point I am trying to bring us to is that we see and contemplate the infinite value of the spiritual blessing over the temporal earthly blessing. This does not mean that we can only have one or the other. It is not wrong to have many earthly blessings, indeed those who do should be more thankful for them! However, it does mean that there must be a priority and a focus firstly on what is eternal, even if it costs in this life. That essentially is what Jesus means when He tells us to take up our own cross and follow Him. Read the lives of the notable Christians and it will almost always be found that there were good things in life that they gave up to obtain the spiritual blessings, the best things.

A Missionary martyr was found to have written this in his diary shortly before he died.

'He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.'

This holds true for everything. Take life for example. Which would you consider more valuable, a life that can end any time and will do so after 70 -100 years or so, or a life of eternal duration?

Which do you think is better? A life of ageing, sickness, disease, uncertainty, where joys pass quickly but grief lingers on, or a life where there is no more pain, sorrow, sighing, partings or death?

Which do you think is better? A life of struggle and competition to find significance, reputation, peace of heart and provision, or a life of endless peace, joy, provision and royalty as an heir of God?

I hope you see the point. Every desirable thing in this life will be left behind when we die. Our wealth, if we have it, will go to another. The homes we have worked so hard to make our own will probably be redecorated and remodeled by those who follow us in ownership. I suspect all my stuff will go into a skip for landfill! Even our reputations will probably not remain intact. Do you notice how succeeding generations do our forbearers the courtesy of rewriting history so that many former heroes are now villains, and vis-versa!

The parable which Jesus told about the rich man and Lazarus is to teach this very thing. Seek heavenly blessings first because they last. Even if we have little in this life, we are the children of the King, and His court awaits us. This is not a popular way of thinking in our generation. If it was, there would not be the terrible debt that many build up in wanting and buying all the stuff we can't afford. If earthly blessings really made us happy, then this country and this village would be one of the happiest places on earth. Sadly, the more we have, generally speaking, the more we want. There is an eternal destiny for the children of God, it is this we are to keep before our eyes in the cut and thrust of life here and now.

3. We, by adoption bear God's name. We are Christians, Christ's ones. We can either bring honour to the family name by the way we live, or we can dishonor the family name by the way we live. Either way, God's reputation is at stake when He adopts us! The Lord's Prayer gives us the first priority in prayer – that God's Name be hallowed, respected, seen as holy. How does this happen? By our living holy lives before Him in the world. This is holiness inside and outside.

We are debtors to God's mercy. He requires that we live in ever growing holiness before Him. This is one of the reasons that God lives in us and with us by His Holy Spirit. God gives us the same Spirit that Jesus had, to empower and move us to walk in holiness, which is walking in the likeness of Christ. Do you remember a certain Irish football player? He had a long problem with alcohol such that he needed a liver transplant. That transplanted liver came from someone who had died prematurely. Through the

transplant, a life lost was given to one whose life was at risk. The man who received the new liver was in debt to another, and a most reasonable expectation was that he would live in a way such that the gift of life was not squandered. Is that not a fair thing to ask for? Sadly, in the case in point, the gift of life was squandered by continued abuse of drink. What was reasonably required was not paid, and all was lost.

If that is the case with a transplant, how much more is the requirement reasonable when one has given His life purposely for the other? We are obliged to live to the honour and glory of God in this life. This is about obedience to Christ's commands. When we were children, we lived by the rules of the parents' home. We are now to live by the rule of the Father's home.

4. We are given the same Holy Spirit that Christ received. Christ received the Holy Spirit without measure, we receive in measure. The Spirit given is a Holy Spirit. He is personal, He is the Spirit of Jesus. He can be received or rejected, allowed to flow or be quenched. He can be welcomed or grieved. He can be obeyed or disobeyed. He can be sinned against. He is given for a purpose which is implied in His Name. He is a Holy Spirit who is given to work holiness in us and to stir holy responses to His working in us. The Spirit works, and we are to respond and work also. None of us has the Holy Spirit in the fullness with which Christ had Him, but what measure of the Spirit we have, is the full potential of what can be had!

What I mean by this is a little bit difficult to explain. To have a measure of the Spirit does not mean that we just have His big toe, or some part of Him. It is not like cutting a cake and getting a slice that we are to accept even though someone else gets the 'big' piece. The Holy Spirit is not someone who gets cut up and shared out. Perhaps a better analogy is that of domestic electricity. Perhaps in your living room, you have a dimmer switch? When the light is on with the dimmer switch turned down, we get that dreamy low light. However, that does not mean that there is not 240 volts coming into the house, and it does not mean that we are not connected to the National Grid that carries huge voltage. The electricity we use in the dimmed light is still truly electricity, but in measure, not in the fullness of its National Grid potential. So it is with us, we can quench the Spirit by rebellion and sin, and so the light is dimmed. The light can be turned up again, but only as high as the setting God has appointed to us. Imagine what would happen in a house set with 240 volt wiring if the full 10,000volts of transmission came in!

That is far from a perfect analogy. Some of you may be humming the old children's song, 'Jesus bids us shine with a pure clear light.' Even a candle can be seen for miles, so even the least infusion of the Holy Spirit will cause God's work in us to progress, but why not do all we can to have the dimmer switch turned up to as full a brightness as we can so that we become the best children of God possible!

5. By adoption we become heirs of the Father and joint heirs with the Son. I will let you unwrap that one yourselves! The first step is to believe it, that God is actually our

Father, and to be amazed! We are heirs to every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. As I have said, these are the true riches we are to inherit.

6. Because we are adopted, we have the certain hope of glory, of heaven, of spending an eternity in the presence of God in whom is perfect and full life, joy, peace and every good thing in holiness.

This hope and assurance of glory does often ebb and flow in daily life because of what we face in life. Some people have an assured hope, others have a weaker hope, some struggle all their lives to be certain in their hope of heaven, even though true believers.

Assurance rests on the One we believe in, His character, what He has done for us on the Cross, and on what He has promised. One such promise is this. We are told that what God has begun, He will bring to completion. We can never be un-born again. We can become naughty children, disobedient children, in fact that is actually being wicked children, but we are children still. Naughty children are disciplined by their parents, or at least they used to be, and should still be. God the Father will discipline His children when we stray and go our own way.

However, our status as children of God is sure, though our enjoyment of it will vary. We are obliged to live as God our Father requires, we are not free to live as we want, we were bought with a price, so we are to glorify God by our lives. This is our obligation because of God's grace in making us His children.

Such blessings as these are serious things. They were purchased for us by the shed blood of Christ. They are not small things or toys or fashion accessories, but treasures to guard and enjoy.